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UNCLAS CAIRO 004441

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA BASKEY AND NEA/PD BENZE

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL KPAO EG SY

SUBJECT: SYRIAN "HIT LIST" NOT NEWS IN EGYPT

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Egyptian media have largely ignored recent press reports citing U.S. comments about a possible Syrian 'hit list' of targeted Lebanese public figures opposed to continued Syrian influence in Lebanon. To the extent the issue has been covered locally, two pro-government newspapers ran unsigned editorials June 12 and 13 blaming the U.S. of being behind the original stories in order to justify its "aggression" against Syria. Surprisingly, opposition and independent newspapers, often the first to criticize Washington policies, have been silent on the topic. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) While pan-Arab satellite channels reported extensively on continued reports of a Syrian "hit list" containing the names of Lebanese opposition figures, Egyptian TV did not offer commentary on the story in its June 10 - 13 coverage. Leading pro-government newspaper Al Ahram (circulation: 750,000), widely considered to be the government's "voice," also ignored the story. Al Ahram editors and reporters told PA LES on June 12 that Al Ahram would not publish any reports or commentaries about the USG accusations against Syria, and did not offer reasons for their position.

¶3. (U) Meanwhile, two unsigned editorials appeared in pro-government newspapers Al Gomhouriya (circulation: 200,000) and Al Akhbar (circulation: 800,000) on June 12 and 13, respectively. The Al Gomhouriya editorial claimed: "Accusing Syria now is similar to the U.S. having falsely accused Iraq of possessing WMD, which was used to justify aggression against the Iraqi people. These accusations are a threat to the region's stability and security." Taking a similar line, the Al Akhbar editorial, under the headline "Does the U.S. Want to Confirm the Israeli Occupation of Syria?" stated: "The Bush administration has a history of false accusations - like those against Iraq, which led to the American occupation of that country. The whole world believes Syria, because she has no history of lying and has respected international laws to regain her territories occupied by Israel. So, what is the main goal behind the U.S. accusations? The clear objective is that the U.S. wants to attack Syria - or ignore a possible Israeli attack to confirm its occupation of the Golan Heights." (Note: Both newspapers traditionally publish editorials with an anti-American line, viewing USG policy in the Middle East as "aggressive" and serving Israel's interests. End note.)

GRAY